



UNDERSTANDING MARINE DEBRIS

What Is Marine Debris?

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration defines marine debris as any man-made object discarded, disposed of or abandoned that enters the coastal or marine environment. Cigarette filters, beverage bottles and cans, food wrappers, fishing line, nets and gear are some of the most common debris items.

Where Does It Come From?

While there are many types of debris, it all shares a common origin – people. People's mishandling of waste materials and a host of other items constitutes the bulk of the marine debris problem.



STEVEN SIEGEL, MARINE PHOTOBANK

What are the Impacts?

Abandoned nets, plastic tarps, fishing gear and other debris can smother and crush sensitive ecosystems and their bottom-dwelling species.

Fishing line, nets, rope and other debris can entangle and drown many wildlife species. Animals can also ingest debris, which can lead to starvation and/or choking.

Medical and personal hygiene debris – which can contain harmful bacteria – can enter waterways when sewer systems fail or overflow. Syringes and broken glass pose obvious dangers to bare-footed beachgoers. Grocery and trash bags, fishing line, nets, rope and other debris can wrap around boat propellers and clog seawater intakes, causing costly damage and becoming a safety hazard.

What You Can Do to Prevent Marine Debris

- Reduce, reuse, recycle. Choose reusable items and use fewer disposable ones.
- Retain all pieces of fishing line, net or other litter for proper disposal in trash containers.
- Keep streets, sidewalks, parking lots and storm drains free of trash – they empty into our oceans.
- Stow all trash on your boat for proper disposal on land. At the beach, park or playground, dispose of all trash in the proper receptacles or take your trash home with you. Pick up any debris you see while out.
- Serve as an example to others. Get involved in cleanups in your area and encourage others to help keep the beaches and oceans clean.

